

Print this Page

Nicholas R. Howe: City should take care in viewing Smith College as a piggy bank

Friday, October 23, 2015

(Published in print: Saturday, October 24, 2015)

To the editor:

Rarely does a voice raised in favor of the mayor's proposed payment-in-lieu-of-taxes, or PILOT, program fail to mention Smith College's \$1.8 billion endowment.

It is tempting to view this sum as a piggy bank available to be spent on all sorts of worthy projects, including funding city operations. Yet as a private institution, Smith's very future depends on wisely husbanding its endowment and spending it within reasonable limits.

Smith does not run a convenient \$1.6 million surplus that can be simply diverted to city coffers, and already draws as much from its endowment each year as is fiscally prudent. Those in favor of the mayor's proposed PILOT should realize that the impact of this program may very well fall in large part on students in the form of higher tuition and on local businesses in the form of reduced spending by the college if it is implemented.

It concerns me that the mayor's proposal seems to have been designed to squeeze a few sacrificial lambs (one in particular very much larger than the rest) while leaving most people unaffected and therefore unlikely to object. To many taxpayers in Northampton, this must seem like an easy source of free money.

If the mayor had proposed a truly broad-based plan that included religious property and therefore touched many more people at a personal level, might public opinion toward the proposal be different? I invite fair-minded residents of the city to consider.

Nicholas R. Howe

Northampton

Source URL:<http://www.gazettenet.com/home/19114338-95/nicholas-r-howe-city-should-take-care-in-viewing-smith-college-as-a-piggy>